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ABSTRACT

The Family to Family initiative has encouraged states to reconceptualize, redesign, and reconstruct their foster care systems. By 1996, the initiative was being implemented in five states, five Georgia counties, and Los Angeles County, California. This paper describes some of the ways natural helpers can assist professionals achieve the necessary changes to foster care systems. Natural helpers located in a neighborhood are likely to understand the problems and cultural issues better than people who do not live in the neighborhood. They can be more committed to solving problems because the challenges affect them personally. Relationships with the natural helpers within a community can help professionals build connections and work with families. There are many difficulties in establishing relationships with natural helpers, but the benefits outweigh the problems. Two appendixes list activities of natural helpers and tools professionals can use in teaching natural helpers. (SLD)

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Family to Family

TOOLS FOR Rebuilding Foster Care

Walking Our Talk In the Neighborhoods

Partnerships Between Professionals and Natural Helpers

PART THREE

BUILDING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS IN CHILD WELFARE

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Family TO Family
TOOLS FOR
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Partnerships Between Professionals and Natural Helpers

BUILDING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS IN CHILD WELFARE, PART THREE

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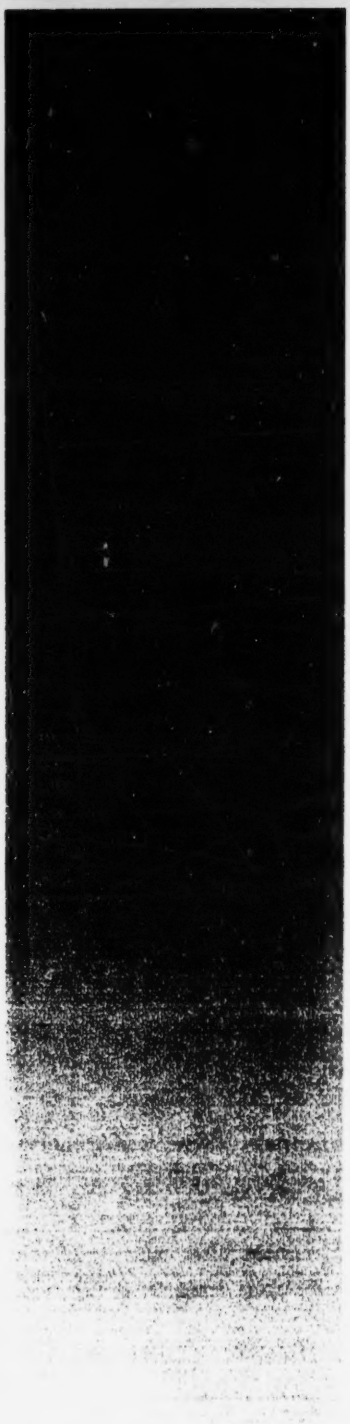

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INTRODUCTION

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Mission in Child Welfare

The Annie E. Casey Foundation was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, a founder of United Parcel Service, and his sister and brothers, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human service reforms, and community supports that better meet the needs of vulnerable families.

The Foundation's work in child welfare is grounded in two fundamental convictions. First, there is no substitute for strong families to ensure that children grow up to be capable adults. Second, the ability of families to raise children is often inextricably linked to conditions in their communities.

The Foundation's goal in child welfare is to help neighborhoods build effective responses to families and children at risk of abuse or neglect. The Foundation believes that these community-centered responses can better protect children, support families, and strengthen communities.

Helping distressed neighborhoods become environments that foster strong, capable families is a complex challenge that will require transformation in many areas. Family foster care, the mainstay of all public child welfare systems, is in critical need of such transformation.

The Family to Family Initiative

With changes in policy, in the use of resources, and in program implementation, family foster care can respond to children's need for out-of-home placement and be a less expensive and often more appropriate choice than institutions or other group settings.

This reform by itself can yield important benefits for families and children, although it is only one part of a larger effort to address the overall well-being of children and families in need of child protective services.

Family to Family was designed in 1992 in consultation with national experts in child welfare. In keeping with the Annie E. Casey Foundation's guiding principles, the framework for the initiative is grounded in the belief that family foster care must take a more family-centered approach that is: (1) tailored to the individual needs of children and their families, (2) rooted in the child's community or neighborhood, (3) sensitive to cultural differences, and (4) able to serve many of the children now placed in group homes and institutions.

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The Foundation's goal in child welfare is to help neighborhoods build effective responses to families and children at risk of abuse or neglect.

The ***Family to Family*** Initiative has encouraged states to reconceptualize, redesign, and reconstruct their foster care system to achieve the following new system-wide goals:

- ❒ To develop a network of family foster care that is more neighborhood-based, culturally sensitive, and located primarily in the communities where the children live;
- ❒ To assure that scarce family foster home resources are provided to all those children (and only to those children) who in fact must be removed from their homes;
- ❒ To reduce reliance on institutional or congregate care (in hospitals, psychiatric centers, correctional facilities, residential treatment programs, and group homes) by meeting the needs of many more of the children in those settings through family foster care;
- ❒ To increase the number and quality of foster families to meet projected needs;
- ❒ To reunite children with their families as soon as that can safely be accomplished, based on the family's and children's needs, not the system's time frames;
- ❒ To reduce the lengths of children's stay in out-of-home care; and
- ❒ To decrease the overall number of children coming into out-of-home care.

With these goals in mind, the Foundation selected and funded three states (Alabama, New Mexico, and Ohio) and five Georgia counties in August 1993, and two additional states (Maryland and Pennsylvania) in February 1994. Los Angeles County was awarded a planning grant in August 1996. States and counties funded through this Initiative were asked to develop family-centered, neighborhood-based family foster care systems within one or more local areas.

Communities targeted for the initiative were to be those with a history of placing large numbers of children out of their homes. The sites would then become the first phase of implementation of the newly conceptualized family foster care system throughout the state.

The Tools of *Family to Family*

All of us involved in ***Family to Family*** quickly became aware that new paradigms, policies, and organizational structures were not enough to both make and sustain substantive change in the way society protects children and supports families. New ways of actually doing the work needed to be put in place in the real world. During 1996, therefore, the Foundation and ***Family to Family*** grantees together developed a set of tools that we believe will help others build a neighborhood-based family foster care system. In our minds, such tools are indispensable elements of real change in child welfare.

The tools of ***Family to Family*** include the following:

- ❒ Ways to recruit, train, and support foster families;
- ❒ A decisionmaking model for placement in child protection;
- ❒ A model to recruit and support relative caregivers;
- ❒ New information system approaches and analytic methods;
- ❒ A self-evaluation model;
- ❒ Ways to build partnerships between public child welfare agencies and the communities they serve;
- ❒ New approaches to substance abuse treatment in a public child welfare setting;
- ❒ A model to confront burnout and build resilience among child protection staff;
- ❒ Communications planning in a public child protection environment;
- ❒ A model for partnerships between public and private agencies;
- ❒ Ways to link the world of child welfare agencies and correctional systems to support family resilience; and
- ❒ Proven models that move children home or to other permanent families.

New ways of actually doing the work needed to be put in place in the real world.

We hope that child welfare leaders and practitioners find one or more of these tools of use. We offer them with great respect to those who often receive few rewards for doing this most difficult work.

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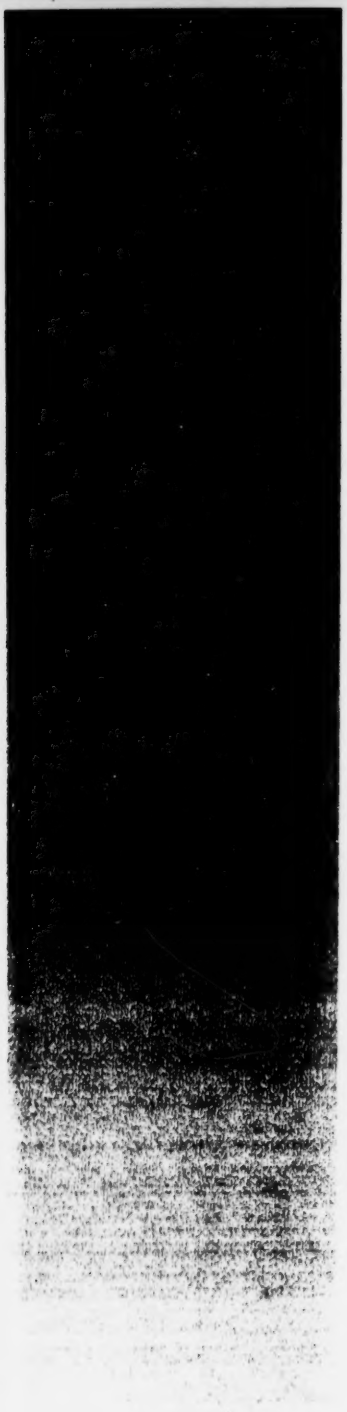

OVERVIEW

We Need New Approaches to Human Services Delivery

The late 1990s are difficult times in human services. Both workers and recipients are dissatisfied with the processes and outcomes of many of the models used to deliver services. Programs are too expensive. They don't seem culturally relevant. All too often, models cannot document that they achieve the results they claim. Taxpayers are often frustrated. Human services workers are often discouraged. Sometimes we feel overwhelmed by the problems we face.

We search for new models and have difficulty finding them. We do find some models that people like. When we try to replicate them, some groups welcome them with open arms. Others become defensive of their turf. Political battles ensue, taking valuable time and energy away from helping people. Attempts to improve the situation by "reforming" the health care and welfare systems may have benefits in the long run, but in the short term they can add to our feelings of helplessness, confusion, and vulnerability.

The problems of those we wish to help are getting worse, and our methods are not as effective as we would like. The funding streams are getting smaller, so that we must do more with less. The polarization on solutions is increasing: some advocate jail time and orphanages, and others continue to insist upon the right of genetic parents to raise their children however they see fit. We must learn to deal with conflicts and move ahead. We must do better at using all the resources available in our communities. Ultimately, we are all striving as individuals and communities to shift from blaming to helping, and to achieve a true, flexible, and mutually supportive collaboration.

Promising Directions

We have near-consensus about promising ways to accomplish more with fewer resources. Certain buzzwords have found their way into today's human services language, words that Charles Bruner calls a "Service Mantra." They include such concepts as "empowerment" and "enhancing capacity." Principles include building on strengths, taking a holistic approach, individual tailoring, decisionmaking partnerships, setting short-term specific goals, and emphasizing certain worker characteristics such as compassion and congruence (Kinney, Strand, Hagerup and Bruner, 1994).

Some of the trendiest buzzwords today are related to the shifting roles of professionals and to capitalizing upon the existing strengths of neighborhood residents to get them involved in self-help, mutual aid, and mutual support. Pioneers like Frank Reissman have been putting those concepts into practice for decades, but most of us are still struggling to figure out how to bring them alive in our work.

Purpose of This Paper

The purpose of this paper is to begin going "beyond the buzzwords" in specifying issues and alternatives, to raise awareness of challenges and solutions, and to provide some concrete examples for the ways partnerships can work.

Professionals and bureaucrats alone have not been able to solve problems facing our families. We must include more people, more skills, and more resolve at more levels if we are going to make the differences we would like.

Limitations to Overreliance on Professional and Bureaucratic Solutions

Overreliance on professional helpers and formal agency and system solutions can fail to create strategies that are fully relevant to and congruent with the needs of specific neighborhoods, because those in charge lack information and understanding.

For one thing, overreliance is too expensive. Professionals' salaries are higher than we can afford, if an adequate amount of help is provided. Dollars that are spent for professionals usually end up increasing the financial stability of people and organizations outside the community, rather than adding to local economic development.

Overreliance on professionals can send the message to community people that they cannot help themselves and must be rescued, thus attacking rather than enhancing their sense of self-efficacy. It can give people in the community implicit permission to wait until the professional provides the service, or until there is money for the professional. The strategy can also create the belief that if help is successful, it is because the professional is good, and if the help doesn't work, it is because the recipient is inadequate, further demeaning the sense of self-efficacy of the recipient.

Common Constraints Upon the Way We View Professionals and Natural Helpers

We place unnecessary constraints on roles, making both professionals and natural helpers less effective. We usually think of professionals as addressing intrapsychic problems. Neighborhood workers have been assigned to "prevention," or problems that aren't too severe. They are regarded as appropriate chiefly for concrete issues, like building speed bumps, getting streetlights installed, or getting drug houses closed.

In fact, all the problems are interrelated. Residents and community workers and agency staff all have different perspectives on the causes and resolutions of difficulties.

Professional efforts to solve intrapsychic problems are often hampered by conditions such as poverty and homelessness. Lay people often counsel one another on everything from marital problems and child rearing to thoughts of suicide. Just as we have learned about the irrevocable links between physical and mental health, we need to see distinctions between prevention and intervention as artificial ones. The distinctions we make between concrete services and psychological services are also artificial. Distinctions between the types of help that require graduate degrees, and the kind that can be done by friends and neighbors, are, in many cases, arbitrary.

Usually, paraprofessionals and natural helpers and regular people are thought of as potential solvers of fairly concrete problems: building a playground where none exists, helping young people play basketball, and so on. Agency staff have also had limited roles. If an individual is out of control, professionals are called. If family problems go beyond the norm, they are referred for help. Professionals have dealt with intra- and interpersonal problems. Community workers and residents have dealt with community problems.

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But in fact, all the problems are interrelated. Residents and community workers and agency staff have different perspectives on the causes and resolutions of difficulties. We will all be more effective if we can share our perspectives and expertise to develop new strategies, and these will probably be more creative than any we could develop solely within our own frameworks.

Reasons We Need Natural Helpers

The human services "system" and our community need natural helpers because they know things most professionals don't know about helping; because they can help us to learn to do better; and because they in turn can achieve more with professionals' help than they can without it.

Strengths of Natural Helpers

Natural helpers understand their neighborhoods. They usually understand their own culture and generally more about other cultures in the neighborhood than people who don't live there. They are usually more committed to resolving the issues because the challenges affect them personally. They usually have more trust and status within the neighborhood than outsiders do.

Natural helpers are more likely to hear about problems before they become so severe that intensive intervention is the only option. They are more likely to be available 24 hours a day to those they support, and this can decrease the possibility of people being harmed. They are in a better position than professionals to provide long-term support.

They may provide successful role models. If they are paid for their work, it will help the economic status of the neighborhood.

They have different and necessary skills for helping. They are often more familiar with the intricacies of public bureaucracies than many professionals, because their personal welfare has often depended upon this understanding. They know which strategies work and which do not within their neighborhoods. They often know the needs of the community. They have mastered the ability to function in conditions that may be physically and emotionally scary to professionals, sometimes to the degree that professionals refuse to enter or cannot function well.

Natural helpers are more likely to provide support in the recipient's natural environment. They can support families who have been or would be unable or unwilling to receive services in more traditional settings. This allows for more effective and comprehensive monitoring of child safety. It is more likely to include all family members and, possibly, members of their support networks. Observation of participants in their natural environment allows for a more accurate and complete assessment. Family members, caseworkers and other service providers know that helpers have the opportunity for first-hand observation of family situations, problems, and progress on goals. This can serve to increase their credibility. The helper has continuous opportunities to model the use of new skills in real situations, and his or her presence eliminates the need for the recipient to transfer learning from one setting, such as an office, to another, such as a home.

Common Activities of Natural Helpers

As policymakers begin considering a shift to neighborhood transformation from office-based talk therapy, we can easily present the idea of natural helpers or indigenous workers as a new one. In fact, people have been helping one another before college degrees existed, before licensing existed, since people existed. Throughout time, even people with few resources have reached out to one another, and helped. Appendix A shows a list of common natural-helper activities going on in most of our communities now, usually off our radar screen and separate from the formal helping system.

Ways Natural Helpers Can Help Professionals

Some neighborhood helpers wish to work more closely with professionals. At the same time, they would like to raise the professionals' awareness of the best ways to be helpful. The following are some of their ideas.

Professionals need to keep thinking about *communication, cooperation, and service to people in the community.* They need to build long-term positive relationships with kids and families if they are going to have a positive impact in the larger neighborhood. To build these relationships, they will need to value the gifts and resources that community members already have and to think of ways to encourage, support, recognize, and use them.

Being genuine and earnest is worth a lot. Professionals' good intentions can go a long way. They need to remember, though, that it will take time to develop those relationships. They cannot assume that once they have a few relationships, no further maintenance is required. Professionals would be better off if they didn't talk about other people in the community.

It would really help if professionals would stop "putting themselves above other people," and work on building connections between/among us all. They need to realize the context for behavior, and really be present. If they get invited to private homes, they should go.

Professionals need to do more looking at an individual or family within the larger context of other people and the physical community. (Some families move around but may still retain connections in the community, so it is important to realize that they may still be considered part of it.) If professionals are helping a family, they should seek suggestions from the family about who else might help.

Professionals also would benefit from trying to understand the cultural context and using that information to make culturally appropriate suggestions when they offer advice. They cannot assume that one way of doing things will work for everyone. Also, things change all the time. No one should allow their perceptions of the community and individuals within it to freeze in time. The situation changes and people change as well.

People in the community often need "translators" to explain how formal society systems work – schools, child protective services, and courts. Professionals can try to function as translators. This may mean having to learn for themselves how things work, keeping in mind that larger systems have variations that need to be understood and explained.

When trying to become familiar with a neighborhood or community, professionals should get to know "bridge people." Bridge people are individuals who can introduce a new professional helper to those key members of the neighborhood with substantial influence over other community members. They often are not easy to recognize. Bridge people can be identified by asking local church people, grocery store people, neighborhood centers, food banks, and community resident groups. Professionals should respect the relationship they have with the bridge person. Also, they should not take one person's view of the community/family/individual as necessarily the single and absolute truth.

Professionals need to recognize that the families/individual they work with are key informants who can offer an education. They should remember to be careful about asking for too much information on certain issues (gangs or drug selling, for example), for the sake of everyone's safety.

Professionals should not assume that they must do all the work of community development in a neighborhood, or that it is wise to try. They should share resources with others to build a sense of partnership and to have a larger effect on the community. They should recognize others who have made a contribution to success and let people know that all are parts of the larger group. Individual or

New ways of actually doing the work needed to be put in place in the real world.

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agency group vision should not interfere with the needs of the larger group/community.

Reasons We Still Need Professionals

Advocates for neighborhood transformation and increased respect for natural helpers are often misinterpreted as saying professionals are not necessary. In fact, they are necessary in many capacities.

Strengths of Professionals

Although some of the things professionals do could be done (and, indeed, are being done) by natural helpers, many of their skills are invaluable in the change process, and are as relevant for neighborhood transformation as they might have been for the fifty-minute hour. Some that are particularly valued by natural helpers include the following:

Grants management. Some professionals have had experience in grant-writing, budgeting, and monitoring financial goals and objectives.

Conceptualizing issues. Professionals have some conceptual frameworks that can help others understand and address issues. Professionals have detailed knowledge of conceptual frameworks within which to assess and help resolve individual and family problems.

Helpers can benefit from these frameworks in organizing potentially overwhelming information and in setting and monitoring goals.

Training. Professionals know lots of ways to solve problems. Some are relevant for natural helpers and neighborhoods; some are not. Over time, it becomes easier to tell which is which.

Professionals can educate natural helpers to assume more responsibilities, such as more training, mentoring, and direct help than they are already providing. They can help natural helpers to learn to provide training, and work with them to adapt existing materials and develop new materials.

Evaluation. Professionals have often been trained to specify outcomes and to collect and analyze information. They have a systematic orientation and can understand controlled observation. Although natural helpers are sometimes annoyed with the system's insistence on this activity, they can usually accept it and continue to work hard to document what they are doing.

Identification of strengths. Professionals can help natural helpers become aware of just how much they do know and can encourage them to follow through on their beliefs.

Fundraising. Professionals usually can write. They know the language most funding sources use. They know people who make decisions about funding. They can help others learn to develop, fund, operate, and evaluate their own strategies.

Advocacy. Professionals can speak out on behalf of natural helpers. If professionals have spent time in neighborhoods, they can sometimes translate realities to policymakers and other professionals who have not been so fortunate.

Service delivery. Professionals can provide services themselves when necessary. They can provide specialized services in very difficult problem areas.

Problem solving. They know multitudes of techniques for problem solving.

Mentoring. They can make natural leaders aware that they are capable people. They can help others learn to develop, fund, operate, and evaluate their own strategies.

Ways Professionals Might Help Natural Helpers

Some skills of professionals are hard-won through years of study and experience. But we must remember that nonprofessionals are also gaining skills and knowledge as they live. Some learn the same skills through life as professionals learned through college.

Some skills commonly thought to be the purview of professionals alone are inaccessible to lay people only because of the jargon.

Ultimately, we are all striving as individuals and communities to shift from blaming to helping, and to achieve a true, flexible and mutually supportive collaboration.

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We often talk of professionals' activities in special languages involving terms like borderline personality, resistance, denial, and attention deficit disorder. Not everyone understands these professional languages, and it is easy to become intimidated. We may believe a person must have a special degree and special language in order to be helpful.

When one looks closely at the specific activities of professionals, it is possible to translate most of them into regular English that can be understood by all. Lay people can learn many of these activities one by one, even without a particular degree. Some examples of activities professionals could teach natural helpers are shown in Appendix B.

Professional agency staff members may need to change from seeing their roles as "saving" neighborhoods and residents to seeing themselves as enhancing the capacity of community workers and residents to provide more of their own help. At the same time, just as lay people will never do brain surgery, there will always be especially difficult or violent situations that will require the help of those with many years of specialized training and experience. Our challenge now is to determine what skills can be taught to many others and what capacities should rightfully be thought of as professional domain.

Professionals may gradually take on new roles, including helping paraprofessionals and others learn the tools, instead of using the tools so directly themselves. Professionals can help others learn to provide training and help others adapt our materials to their situations. Professionals also may become more involved in helping others learn to develop, fund, operate, and evaluate their own models, and in providing specialized services for very difficult problem areas.

We place unnecessary constraints on roles, making both professionals and natural helpers less effective.

CHALLENGES

Although we can specify many potential advantages of professionals working more closely with natural helpers, we can also point out many potential challenges in doing so. We must continually remind ourselves that neither professionals nor natural helpers are homogeneous groups. Each relationship is unique. At the same time, some threads are likely to run through many attempts at partnerships.

Difficulties in Even Meeting One Another

Although it is possible that systems representatives may meet natural helpers as clients, it is very rare that they run into each other on equal grounds. They usually do not live in the same neighborhoods, attend the same churches, or participate in the same leisure activities. Administrators in the system have even fewer opportunities to meet natural helpers because they no longer see clients.

Lack of Awareness of One Another's Cultures

When they do meet, professionals and natural helpers are often doing essentially different dances, and they begin treading upon one another immediately. Professionals have a fairly formalized way of greeting each other, making a few neutral comments about the weather or some news event, and then diving into a very linear agenda. Natural helpers do not separate their helping roles from themselves as people, so that they are more likely either to plunge into an informality and warmth which is bewildering to professionals, or to withdraw completely or react aggressively in response to methods of talking that seem to them forced and indirect.

Personal Histories

Natural helpers and professionals usually begin their relationships with stereotypes about one another. Most have had direct personal contacts; all have heard about either hopeless clients or uppity professionals who have done significant damage to others.

Natural helpers have had both good and bad relationships with professionals and may tend to divide them into those two categories. Their experiences with "the system" may have been bad. There can be a tendency to react negatively to "system-like" requirements, such as attention to cost-effectiveness or guidelines about areas of focus and emphasis. Many of these requirements are non-negotiable, and angry reactions do nothing but distance natural helpers from the system they wish to change.

Emotional Reactions of Some Professionals

In any new venture, anxiety, frustration, and confusion are likely. Some examples of particular triggers professionals may encounter include the following.

They may literally be unable to understand the language, or the accent, or some of the phrases used by natural helpers. This is not a pleasant feeling. Natural helpers are usually from different cultures than professionals. Differences in greeting behaviors, eye contact, formality, touch, and ways of expressing emotions can rapidly offend on a personal level when participants are not aware of their cultural differences.

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To meet natural helpers, professionals will often have to go into neighborhoods that frighten them. Scary things may happen while they are there. In some areas, professionals will in fact be more at risk than if they stayed in high-rises downtown.

Some professionals may worry that natural helpers will usurp their roles and endanger their job security. It is hard to feel great about someone who might leave you unemployed. They may risk credibility with their peers who may see them as betraying their profession and going over to the wrong side.

We really have very little, if any, hard data about what natural helpers are accomplishing, and what they would be able to accomplish if they had more training and support. There is always the risk that helpers may do harm instead of helping, and the professional may be blamed.

Natural helpers usually do not keep schedules the same way professionals do. They are much more flexible in responding to immediate needs. Professionals may take offense at lateness or missed meetings, when it is a cultural difference rather than an insult. Because they often have fewer financial resources, natural helpers have fewer options in many emergencies. Cars are more likely to break down, airfares or tuition may not be available as planned. Professionals will likely become entangled in these predicaments. Professionals may need to provide transportation for natural helpers without cars. This takes additional time.

Emotional Reactions for Some Natural Helpers

Natural helpers are also likely to have their feelings triggered by beginning interactions with professionals. They also risk interacting with someone who is, again, literally, impossible for them to understand. Professional jargon, acronyms, and concepts are often not only totally foreign but also insulting to those who believe many professionals have absolutely no idea what it is like to survive under difficult situations.

Inadvertently and sometimes intentionally, professionals shut natural helpers out of decisionmaking processes. This can be done through lack of eye contact, a raised eyebrow, failure to invite to meetings, and, frequently, polite nods but no real understanding when natural helpers speak.

These exclusionary behaviors are particularly painful to natural helpers because it is now trendy to include them in the helping process. Forums, advisory boards, and new funding streams often advertise new principles involving "neighborhood-based" partnerships and helping people help themselves. But in many cases the real power rests with the same power brokers who have always had it. Natural helpers are aware of meetings held without them, token input, and being put on advisory boards instead of boards of directors. The discrepancy between what professionals say they do and what they actually do makes it difficult for natural helpers to respect them. It makes it difficult for natural helpers to keep trying to work with professionals. It makes it very difficult for natural helpers not to get angry.

Professionals also frequently fail to understand the importance of a personal and long-term commitment to natural helpers and other residents of the neighborhoods where they work. Natural helpers are aware of the importance of relationships, and the importance of finding professionals to whom they can relate. Those relationships are precious and have meaning beyond "business." If they end when the grant is over, or when someone gets promoted, it is seen as another betrayal.

Language Differences Between Some Professionals and Natural Helpers

Professionals and natural helpers use different concepts, phrases, and words for talking and thinking about help. When one or the other language is selected, the other partners may feel slighted.

Natural helpers ... usually have more trust and status within the neighborhood than most outsiders do.

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The first word that gets in the way is "partnership." Natural helpers tend to polarize over this concept, bouncing between a belief that at last they will have an equal voice with professionals, and cynicism at having been betrayed in similar situations before. Professionals, on the other hand, often view it as "partnership" if they even consider natural helpers in their plans, especially if they invite them to meetings or put them on advisory boards. The meaning of partnership needs to be clarified for all involved as soon as the word comes up.

Many natural helpers have had either personal or close experience with the state public assistance, child welfare agencies, and housing authorities. They may have felt humiliated and powerless in those interactions. In trying to develop partnerships, miscommunications may have occurred or promises may not have been kept. Allies or others with good intentions within public agencies may agree to work in partnership with natural helpers, but may find they need to slow down or stop the process if it isn't politically feasible, or if the support they thought they had disappears.

These experiences make it hard to expect the best from people and to develop the trusting relationships needed for a real partnership.

Other examples of professional mindsets that can irritate natural helpers include the word "project," because it implies something that comes and goes, while the helpers want their efforts to ripple across time. "Services" is problematic because it implies something done for someone rather than with them. Some natural helpers prefer "approach."

They often don't like "target population," because it implies something in the sights of a rifle. Many don't like "client" because it implies an expert/dependent relationship. "Case" is too unfeeling. Many natural helpers choose to talk about people and families.

Some examples of the differences in basic assumptions about help are shown in Table 1.

Professionals need to keep thinking about communication, cooperation, and service to people in the community.

The words and phrases that we use to talk about helping also vary between professionals and natural helpers. Table 2 shows some examples of these differences.

Lack of Clarity Regarding Roles

Tension Between Responsibilities and Values

People assume different roles within the natural helper and professional categories. It is a challenge to acknowledge both differences in authority and responsibility, and the values of inclusion, respect, and equality.

Inherent Power Differentials

It is unclear exactly what professionals' roles should be. Many natural helpers are just barely making ends meet, increasing their likelihood of a financial crisis from time to time. Because professionals usually have more money, connections, and experience raising money, group members can slide into viewing them as job sources. Professionals may feel pressured to respond to a financial crisis by giving pay advances or personally lending money.

It is easy for professionals to begin to take more responsibility than is helpful, given the partnership's values of self-reliance and independence. Both natural helpers and professionals need to be aware of this balancing act. Both sides need to be sensitive to cues that show when professionals are feeling too much pressure to take more responsibility, or when natural helpers think professionals have taken more control and responsibility than necessary.

Tension About Structure and Rigidity of Roles

Role constraints may limit one's ability to be an effective helper. On the other hand, a lack of constraint may mean a blurring of friendship, mentor, co-worker, and family roles. As partnerships strive to use everyone's strengths, the roles of the program managers or supervisors (whether those roles are filled by professionals or natural helpers) may be

(continued on page 19)

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TABLE 1

Examples of Differences in Language Between Some Professionals and Natural Helpers.

Some Professionals	Some Natural Helpers
Types of Help Provided	
Therapy	Education
Evaluation	Healing
Treatment	Moral and Spiritual Guidance
Aftercare	Resource Development
	Advocacy
	Economic Development
	Community Organization
Who Decides What Type of Help is Offered?	
Federal government	Residents
State government	Neighborhoods
Agency professionals	Communities
Therapists	Recipients of help
Assessment triage team	Partnership
What are the Vehicles for Help?	
The fifty-minute hour	On-site informal connections
Group therapy	Changing neighborhood conditions
Evaluations	Self-help groups
Medications	
Who Needs Help?	
Dysfunctional people	All of us, depending on the time and day
Where Should Help Occur?	
In the office	In life, wherever it is happening

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TABLE 2

Differences in Wording
Between Some Professionals and Natural Helpers.

Some Professionals	Some Natural Helpers
Target population	People who need and want help
Case assignment	Who responds to which needs of this family?
Caseloads	How many families can we help together?
Cases	People
Client	Person, like me, who sometimes has problems in some areas
Service provider	People who help others, fellow person, neighbor, child of God
Vendor: "You will do what I want."	Partner: "We decide together."
Office hours	Whenever they need to talk, all the time
9-5 weekdays	All the time
Hotline	Home phone
Supervision	Talking every day
Length of service	Defining moments/being there when needed
Service delivery	A helping hand
Client pathways	Figuring out a clear way to make things better
Therapy	Talking together, only people don't need letters after their names
Diagnosis: What is this person?	What does this person want and need? How can I help?
Making an assessment	Getting to know one another
The child's needs	How can we help this kid to succeed?
Risk assessment	How can we help this kid to be OK?
Confidentiality	Secrecy
The "bumper" mentality, going at it alone	Reaching out
Being realistic	Having hope
Poor adults can raise children properly	Having a job
Being called	Being objective and cool
Being personal	Witnessing the pain
Keeping work and life separate	Work and life have big overlap
Following the rules	Forging a path, taking one step after another
People as recipients of service	People helping one another
The problem is in the person	Outcomes arise from complex interactions of factors
Services are "talking about problems"	Help is concrete – getting a snake out of the kitchen, making a "Beware of Wolf" sign
Public housing rules regarding number of people per room	Taking in a foster child

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disregarded. Supervisors may have to remind people to let them know what's going on and keep information channeling through them.

Complexity of Individual Roles

Roles in natural helper/professional partnerships can get complex. A group of natural helpers may be made up of husband and wife teams, neighbors, and other friends and family members. Group members may switch among the roles of friend, family, mentor, supervisor, boss and co-conspirator. For example, in the tool People Helping People (PHP), seven members are related to other group members, and all but one either are currently or have been married to or living with other group members. Most members also have personal relationships with one another and share many details of their lives.

It can be difficult for couples always to stay in their co-worker role. Buttons get pushed and people display more of their true relationships than they might like. Arguing in meetings may be commonplace.

Confusion in the Public Agency

The public agency may not be sure where a natural helper/professional partnership group fits in the spectrum of service providers. The agency may already have paraprofessionals who do housework or other concrete tasks. They may have transportation people, volunteers, and, of course, all the professional agencies. They may not know how the partnership differs from these categories, and it can be difficult to clarify.

Financial Complexities in Natural Helper/Professional Partnerships

Confusion about Appropriate Matters for Payment

Natural helpers have worked with families and their neighborhoods for free, often for many years. Natural helper/professional partnerships can provide the opportunity for them to be paid for some or much of their work. For many, this is confusing.

Personal expenses of natural helpers. In one partnership in Tacoma, Washington, a natural helper had been attending school for years to become eligible for a particular position in a new company there. A week before he was to finish, he found that public funding for his graduation fees had ended. He called his professional partner, requesting that she give him $400. She said that was outside the boundaries of PHP, but that she had lots of work to be done around the house and that she would advance it to him if he would do the work. After she agreed to this, she was concerned that roles were already plenty complicated without this. It turned out the group member did the work well, and they became much closer and better able to work together as a result of their (some might say) rash and heedless disregard for boundaries.

Personal expenses. In another example, natural helpers wished to bill the organization sponsoring the partnership when a professional's dog damaged their house.

Food. In order to work around many family, work, or school responsibilities, natural helper/professional partnership meetings may take place during mealtimes. It can be easy to spend a lot of money on food. Some partnerships have found it helpful to set a money limit per meeting. If hosts wish to go beyond this limit, it is up to them.

Goods for families being helped. Even though many natural helpers are living close to the edge with their own bills, they may not hesitate to buy shoes or give money to families they are helping. Often they could get the money another way if they were willing to use the "system" more. Many natural helpers are not accustomed to having expense accounts or keeping receipts.

Potential Loss of Public Assistance Dollars or Increases in Housing Payments Because of Partnership Income

Confusion can arise about how much and what kind of money or goods can be earned without jeopardizing a natural helper's public

Professionals ...can't assume that one way of doing things will work for everyone.

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assistance. It is clearly possible that by earning money, a person might cause more than the earnings to be deducted from the assistance check, so that working causes a net loss. It is also clear that increases in income can influence housing payments and eligibility.

Contingencies will probably be different for each person, so each one needs to negotiate with caseworkers and/or housing representatives. Then they can make their own decisions about payment.

Employee/Contractor Status

Partnerships will have to determine whether members are employees or contractors. Criteria from the Internal Revenue Service and state labor laws need to be examined. People Helping People originally designated most partnership members as contractors. After further examination of IRS criteria and legal consultation, the designation was changed to employees.

Lack of Clarity Regarding Basics of Payment

Other possible payment issues that need to be clarified include: How often will people get paid? Will people get pay advances when in tight financial spots? Is different work worth more or less money? For example, do those providing supervision and other management functions get paid more?

Budget Constraints and Other Pressures on Public Agency Staff

Most public agency staff are expected to do far too much with too little. Child deaths and staff problems seem to appear on the front page of the newspaper almost weekly. These problems make it difficult for staff to find time consistently to work on new directions, because so much is demanded of them in responding to and trying to prevent disasters.

Budgeting constraints also pose obstacles to creation of pathways for natural helpers to get off public assistance. If the public agency already has access to low-cost paraprofessionals and volunteers, and if the agency has financial problems, one primary motivation will be to save money. The agency may wish natural helpers to work for free, as they have before. If costs become comparable to those for paraprofessionals, the agency may find it easier to use an already established service.

Categorization of Funding

Funding sources are often very restrictive about what kind of help they will pay for and what kind of credentials staff must have in order to give that help. Mental health, substance abuse treatment, and child welfare funding streams usually require specific training and credentials. Many tasks of mental health professionals, qualified chemical dependency counselors, or child welfare specialists, though, are already being done by or can be learned by natural helpers. These restrictions, and the underlying belief that all of these tasks can only be done by professionals, limit the ability of professionals to look at alternative ways to serve families.

Differences of Opinion on How to Be Helpful

The most painful experiences can arise when public agency recommendations and perceptions of events differ from those of natural helper partnerships. Natural helpers most often identify with the "clients" and their powerlessness over the system. Many will be very sensitive to stereotyping, a failure to perceive strengths, and any other interactions that may humiliate family members. At the same time, natural helpers may need the money and support of the public agency. They may realize that if they alienate public agency workers, they may not get more referrals. They can be caught between objecting to some practices and preserving their integrity. This can be extremely difficult.

Professional agency staff roles may need to change from "saving" neighborhoods and residents to enhancing the capacity of community workers and residents to provide more of their own help.

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Some public agency workers have been disappointed many times by the families they try to help. Some of them may tend to go into long, vague descriptions of "inadequacy," "diminished capacity," or "personality disorder" that probably will not sit well with natural helpers, especially when there is no acknowledgment of or search for the strengths that people may have.

Public agency workers may feel compelled to refer family members to mental health centers if they believe emotional problems are involved. Families are often referred to a number of different service providers. Public agency workers themselves provide many direct services. Even with efforts by all to pin down who is doing what, situations are always changing, and it may feel impossible to keep up with and coordinate all actors and interventions. This often results in fragmented services and families being torn in many directions. Natural helpers may feel insulted that public agency workers do not think they have anything to offer in helping people with problems such as depression, anxiety, or interpersonal relationships.

Some professionals may worry that natural helpers will usurp their roles and endanger their job security.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

In developing new approaches to professional/natural helper partnerships, it is as important for us to acknowledge and clarify what we do not know as it is to acknowledge what we are learning. A few of the questions we need to address include the following:

- ❒ Which tools commonly used by human services professionals can be transferred for use by neighborhood workers?
- ❒ How do they need to be adapted and/or supplemented by and for various cultural groups?
- ❒ How many of the techniques used within family-based services can be used by natural helpers and paraprofessionals in neighborhoods?
- ❒ How much can natural helpers learn to train their peers?
- ❒ How much of what neighborhood workers and residents are already doing can be packaged and transferred to professionals?
- ❒ Can some neighborhood workers make new careers as trainers?
- ❒ How well will neighborhood workers be able to design, develop, implement, and evaluate their own service strategies and models?
- ❒ What are the limits of neighborhood workers' capacity for providing their own help?
- ❒ What are the most cost-effective roles for professional workers and agencies in the future?

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SUMMARY

In this paper, we have discussed reasons for new approaches to social services, and the advantages and challenges of developing natural helper/professional partnerships. One example of a partnership that is evolving with enthusiasm is People Helping People in Tacoma, WA. An explanation of how they began and the ways they are meeting specific challenges is presented in the paper "People Helping People: Partnerships Between Professionals and Natural Helpers."

In the face of this uncertainty, we can easily fall into limbo, waiting for the path toward the future to become clearer. This would be a sad error for us all, because it is precisely at these times of uncertainty that the status quo is the most amenable to change and that we can make enormous changes for the better if we can find the energy and the hope and the faith. We can build upon past successes and spread what we have learned far beyond what we originally hoped to reach. We have the opportunity to forge new partnerships that will allow us to combine knowledge from many perspectives, creating deeper insights and more creative alternatives.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Some Activities of Natural Helpers

Natural helpers help in many ways. We have, somewhat arbitrarily, categorized examples of their helping into five categories:

- ❒ Skill building
- ❒ Emotional support
- ❒ Community leadership and networking
- ❒ Resource acquisition
- ❒ Concrete help

Some individuals may have assets in all five areas, but people who are strong in only one or two areas can still make important contributions.

These examples are presented to help service designers become aware of the resources that may already exist, so that those resources may be included in planning.

Examples of Skill Building

- ❒ Helping others learn to get and keep transportation.
- ❒ Helping others learn to get and keep child care/baby-sitting.
- ❒ Helping others learn to get and keep legal aid.
- ❒ Helping others learn to get and keep housing.
- ❒ Helping others learn to do housework/help obtain homemaker services.
- ❒ Helping others learn to get and keep employment.
- ❒ Helping others learn to get and keep toys or recreational equipment.
- ❒ Helping others learn to get food and keep it available.
- ❒ Helping others learn to get and keep clothing.
- ❒ Helping others obtain and keep utility benefits or services.
- ❒ Helping others get and keep medical/dental services.
- ❒ Helping others get and keep furniture and household goods.
- ❒ Helping others get and keep recreational opportunities.
- ❒ Helping others get repair services.
- ❒ Helping others get financial aid.
- ❒ Helping others manage money.
- ❒ Serving as role models for others.
- ❒ Providing nutrition education.

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- ❒ Giving the address and phone numbers of agencies to help with specific problems.
- ❒ Informing friends, neighbors, and relatives of their rights and responsibilities.
- ❒ Teaching professionals how better to help.
- ❒ Participating in statewide training, teaching educators the realities of living in poverty.

Providing Emotional Support

- ❒ Listening.
- ❒ Providing positive regard, without judgment.
- ❒ Being available, spending time.
- ❒ Avoiding gossip and manipulation.
- ❒ Addressing issues of personal isolation by creating and sustaining a network of support for children, teens, and adults who want to make more appropriate choices in their lives – especially relating to health, employability, and education.
- ❒ Addressing issues of isolation from mainstream society by creating a chain of mentoring that will link families immersed in poverty with others in mainstream society.

Community Leadership and Networking

- ❒ Organizing activities that help families form positive relationships with each other (potlucks, center work parties, and "parents' night out" sessions).
- ❒ Setting up Skill/Resource Exchanges, identifying tools, materials, skills, and expertise possessed by members of the center.
- ❒ Setting up and managing laundry facilities.
- ❒ Setting up and managing child care cooperatives.
- ❒ Developing and running job clubs to share job leads and offer support to other parents looking for work.
- ❒ Subscribing to area newspapers and posting classified ads for apartment rentals and help-wanted ads.
- ❒ Establishing a "craft co-op" in which people make items together and split the profits.
- ❒ Contacting local police/sheriff's department about starting a neighborhood watch program: on a large local map, chart out the location and times of crimes in the neighborhood.
- ❒ Discussing the effects that a change in street lighting or police presence could have: begin discussion with police department about "community policing" in which officers walk (rather than drive) through the neighborhood or establish a "mini-station" of 2-3 officers in the neighborhood.
- ❒ Contacting local rape prevention program for basic information about self-defense classes; contract with trainer to provide classes to Head Start parents; request funding for tuition/child care for parents to participate in a self-defense class; request funding for whistles as follow-up to self-defense class; bring in speaker on "victim advocacy" or victim restitution services.
- ❒ Starting a child care co-op in which families exchange care services and each family contributes "co-op" hours.

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- ❒ Establishing a support group for families affected by substance abuse.
- ❒ Contacting grocery store chains about the need for a store in the neighborhood (either to keep an existing store or to bring in a new one).
- ❒ Organizing weekly storytelling and plays by local artists.
- ❒ Organizing tutoring.
- ❒ Organizing arts and crafts classes.
- ❒ Encouraging networking within the community through information-sharing and group-building.
- ❒ Acting as a role model for professionals on interaction with residents.
- ❒ Advising professionals on holding meetings or training sessions. Natural helpers know the most appropriate place to hold the training – not only convenient to all, but comfortable and accessible for subsequent activities. They can devise ways to make sure all trainees can attend consistently. They can address baby-sitting needs. What will work best? Daytime programming with baby-sitting on-site? Night programming with stipends for baby-sitting?
- ❒ Initiating change by participating in coalitions and community activities that affect their neighborhoods and then planning small group training sessions in their neighborhoods.
- ❒ Joining boards and coalitions in order to educate decisionmakers on their neighborhood needs.
- ❒ Volunteering for in-depth newspaper feature articles focusing on issues that affect the poor and on ways building strengths in the neighborhood can support long-term change.

Resource Acquisition

- ❒ Participation in focus groups developing public relations materials on maternal health issues for inner-city women.
- ❒ Knowledge about where to find transportation and housing.
- ❒ Information about buying, selling, and trading with junk dealers, hock shops, garages, landlords, informal food and clothing banks, loan sharks.

Concrete Help

- ❒ Baby-sitting
- ❒ Fixing things
- ❒ Braiding hair
- ❒ Gardening

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Appendix B

Tools for Professionals to Use in Teaching Natural Helpers

Tools for helpers to conceptualize helping and problems

- ❒ Systems approaches
- ❒ Learning approaches
- ❒ Cognitive approaches
- ❒ Environmental approaches
- ❒ Philosophical and spiritual approaches
- ❒ Psychodynamic approaches

Tools for helpers to sustain themselves

- ❒ Ways to assess what hurts
- ❒ Conceptual frameworks to design supports and solutions

Ways for helpers to keep people safe

- ❒ Structure the situation before the helper arrives
- ❒ Structure the situation when the helper is helping
- ❒ Structure the situation between times the helper is there
- ❒ Help people learn how to assess the potential for violence
  - Assault
  - Homicide
  - Suicide
  - Child Abuse
  - Domestic Violence
- ❒ Help people learn not to trigger each other
- ❒ Develop safety plans
- ❒ Help people learn how to break the chain when triggering begins
- ❒ Help people learn how to get help when situations start to get out of control
- ❒ Child-proof the home

Ways for helpers to engage those they wish to help

- ❒ Meet people when and where they prefer to be met
- ❒ Greet people in ways that will show respect and help them feel comfortable
- ❒ Engage in culturally appropriate initial conversations
- ❒ Communicate that they understand the meaning as well as the words of what people are trying to say
- ❒ Respond to people's requests
- ❒ Listen without judging
- ❒ Affirm people's strengths, successes, and potential

Tools for helpers and those they are helping to assess situations

- ❒ Exercises to help people assess their values
- ❒ Exercises to help people identify their strengths and resources
- ❒ Exercises to help people clarify and prioritize their goals
- ❒ Ways to tell what happens before a particular problem occurs, perhaps triggering the problem
- ❒ Ways to tell what happens after a particular problem occurs, perhaps rewarding it
- ❒ Journals where people can safely tell what is going on

Ways helpers can prevent problems from occurring

- ❒ Help people figure out how they spend their time
- ❒ Help people figure out which times cause them trouble
- ❒ Help people think of other ways to spend their time
- ❒ Help people actually do the other things
- ❒ Help people avoid danger
- ❒ Help people respond differently to the times that cause them trouble

Tools to motivate people toward positive change

- ❒ Showing understanding of what people are trying to say
  - Affirming the words, the feelings, and the meaning of what the person is saying
- ❒ Helping the person find strengths and values
  - Doing certain games, activities together
- ❒ Helping the person feel more important
  - Being respectful
  - Spending time
  - Noticing the good things
- ❒ Helping the person feel more hopeful
- ❒ Helping the person see that he or she is in charge
- ❒ Helping the person see a positive vision of the future
  - Imagining it
  - Drawing a picture
  - Making a collage
  - Writing a letter
- ❒ Helping the person see the difference between what is desired and where the current road leads
- ❒ Helping the person feel more confident about being able to change
  - Showing that others have problems, too
  - Sharing something of your own background and struggles
- ❒ Helping the person see that we can feel two ways about change
  - Saying things that show both ways of feeling
- ❒ Helping people decide where they are in terms of wanting to change

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- ❒ Helping people see why change might be good
  - Noticing the things they say about why change would get them good things
  - Adding on just a little to what they are saying, in the direction of change
  - Rewarding them for little steps
  - Helping people see why not changing might be bad
  - Noticing the things they say about bad things that will happen if they don't change
  - Giving them information about some of the things that could happen or are happening
  - Providing consequences when they don't try
- ❒ Helping people remember times when they made changes
- ❒ Helping them identify people like themselves who have made changes
- ❒ Sharing genuine beliefs in people's abilities to make changes
- ❒ Helping people understand the process of change, and that it usually doesn't happen immediately

Tools to help others make changes in certain areas

- ❒ Parenting
  - Learning to tell what is really happening: Who does what to whom?
  - Noticing and rewarding kids doing the right thing
  - Knowing when to ignore, distract, reward, and punish things kids do
  - Setting up the house so kids won't get in trouble
  - Getting clear what you expect from kids
  - Getting clear what will happen if they do or do not meet expectations
  - Having family meetings
  - Giving kids choices
  - Knowing how much supervision kids need
  - What to do when your kids are fighting
  - Helping kids respond to "No"
  - Showing your kids how you want them to be
- ❒ Managing feelings
  - Figuring out what you are feeling (using the feeling thermometer)
  - Using the faces chart
  - Figuring out what might be causing the feeling
  - How thinking can cause feelings
  - How eating can cause feelings
  - Things to do to conquer anger
    - Using the crisis cards
    - Changing thinking
    - Doing something else
    - Solving the problem
    - Calling someone
    - Practicing being frustrated

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Things to do to stop being depressed

Figuring out what is causing depression

- Start doing different things
- Give credit for small steps
- Look at things that led to cheerfulness in the past
- Stop self-criticism

Ways to stop being anxious

- Learning not to get anxious in the first place
- Things to do if it happens

Tolerating being uncomfortable

❒ Getting along with other people

Learning social skills

Learning problem solving

Learning to be assertive

Learning to listen

Learning to negotiate

Learning to make decisions

Learning to say "no"

Learning to tell others that what they do is bothersome

Learning what to do when others say something you do is bothering them

Controlling impulses

Resisting pressure from others

Accepting "no"

Tools for helpers to help others maintain changes they have made

❒ Learning to predict slips

❒ Planning to prevent slips from happening

❒ Having a plan to get back on track

❒ Considering all possibilities to prevent slips

Exercising

Eating right

Praying

Using acupuncture

Meditating

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